

1/22/2008

FCC:

This comment is in regards to the E-Rate program for schools and libraries. Here we are at the end of the filing period for year 11 and basically no internal connections have been funded for year 10. People, the funding year started July 1, 2007 and here it is 2008 and 90% schools are still waiting. The major problem with this late funding is that schools who are in the low 80's are having to re-file for the same thing over again causing both the schools and the SLD more paperwork and headaches. This is a major problem that needs to be addressed; poor school districts could not make it technology wise without these discounts.

The most glaring problem is in the basic maintenance category. Maintenance is needed all year long and schools depend on that funding to ease the burden of network maintenance. If they don't get funded until April or May, that funding year is gone and they have either had to pay full price and hope for re-imbursement, or do without. Service providers are not going to do this maintenance for free until the school or library's gets funded. If the funding year is from July 1-June 30 then all funding should be in place by July 1. The schools have to follow SLD hard timelines, so why shouldn't they. Everyone knows that they have thousands of applications and not enough people to review them, but is that the schools fault? Without these discounts, there are some rural districts that could not even have internet access for their students.

This is a broken system and needs to be fixed. SLD has from February to June to review these applications and make a decision. But instead, they asked the same questions over and over and then take months to make a decision. Once they make a decision, they slowly release the funds once a week and then some weeks, none at all. You and the SLD know how much money is going to be available for this program, so distribute it in a timely fashion so it can do what this program was meant to do, help rural schools keep up with the ever growing technological world and educate our students to be able to exist in that world.

One suggestion is to start this application process sooner. Technology directors, business managers, and superintendents work all year long; they are the ones making decisions on this program. Once they get school going again, they have no time to do what it takes to properly address E-Rate and all its complexities. If they have time to think through their needs, the whole process would go smoother.

For once, put bureaucracy behind and think of the children in this country who live in the wealthiest country in the world but educationally wise they are 25th. This is appalling.